DON ESTEVAN'S HONOR.*

By Eleanor M. Ingram.

It was held in keeping by a viking of the South and by another whom he brought over the sea.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

ESTEVAN DE LUCENA, cousin of Luis de Lucena, ruler of the island kingdom of Rocaverde, is left in command by the latter. Treason is discovered, but only one of the plotters, Gonsalvo by name, is apprehended. The ships come in, and Luis is informed of the matter by Estevan. That night Estevan is entrapped by one Mirando in a room where are assembled all the other conspirators, and is told of a dastardly plot to kill his cousin. Realizing the futility of resistance, he promises, on condition that Luis's life be spared, to shield the officers, who have had enough of plotting, and to release Gonsalvo. Luis, in anger, orders him into exile in the Quinta, on the other side of the island. Estevan's sister, Arria, lately returned from a convent, pleads in vain to go to him; Luis, unable to bear with the situation, puts to sea again.

A strange ship comes in, and from it lands a beautiful girl, Floria Mendez y del Carpio, whose father, a Castilian noble, has gone on an expedition with Don Luis, sending her to Rocaverde until his return. Floria and Arria stray by chance into Estevan's old rooms, and are there discovered by Mirando. Juan Perez, a little boy of the village, tells Floria a great deal about this hero, Don Estevan, awakening her interest. Lucena returns, and one day Arria comes upon him as he is kissing Floria's hand. She cannot hide the fact that she cares, and the viking of the South folds her in a rapt embrace. But she refuses to marry him until he shall have set Estevan free, and this he will not do. The ships set sail again.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOST IN THE FOREST.

LUCENA sailed the next day according to his word, but not until he had seen Floria established in her new home. He was perfectly unaffected by Arria's jealousy and Doña Soledad's disapproval; Floria's pretty gratitude was the only pleasant memory he carried to sea. Between Arria and Estevan he refused to choose; and as of old he turned to the ocean, whose cool, translucent arms were ever opened to him, her son.

From her mountain refuge Floria, her dark eyes soft and friendly, watched the stately ships glide out of the bay.

"I would like you to be very happy," she said aloud. "Good-by, *señor*."

There was no response save the hum of bees in the flowering vines that covered the low, square house. Smiling contentedly, she looked down the sloping mountain side to the dimpled azure of the Mediterranean far below. Presently she crossed the courtyard to the door.

"Señora Celia, how does one see the other side of the mountain?" she asked gaily. "This side I know—the smooth hills, the castle, and at the very foot the white village—but the other? Is it the same?"

The old lady surveyed her with dreamy satisfaction.

"No, my dear, it is very different. The mountain is full of cliffs and sudden falls, and there is no village there. Only near the bottom is the deserted house of the younger Lucenas, the other branch.

"Deserted?" echoed Floria involuntarily.

"No, sister," interposed the Señora Paz, from her chair opposite; "there were always servants, and now Estevan de Lucena is exiled there by his lord."

"Yes, yes," murmured the Señora Celia, with the uncertain memory of the very old, "He they call *El Señorito*

He came here once with Don Luís, and they stood out there together, my lord's arms around his shoulder. I remember."

"That was years ago, Celia," said her sister reprovingly. "One does not recall those things now. Doña Floria, to see the other side of Rocaverde you must follow that little path; it is not far."

"Thank you, *señora,*" responded Floria soberly. "I think I will stay here."

But the next morning she went, drawn by half shrinking curiosity.

The little path ended in an open space, before which the reverse side of the mountain lay spread out with panoramic distinctness.

It was truly very different; thick pines took the place of cultivated orange and olive trees, clinging in dense masses up the irregular slopes and cliffs. At the foot, the sea roared along a rocky shore and dragged itself hissing across the bare sands, where clumps of sea-grass stood desolately. Near the bottom, a gray tower rose through the tree-tops, quite alone; no cheerful cottages nestled on this side, filled with happy voices of women and children.

Yet the scented pine forests had a fascination of their own, as Floria presently realized. It was, at the least, a mile to the Quinta, she reflected; and Lucena had probably forbidden his cousin to wander over the hills. After a while she ventured a short distance under the trees, crushing the soft needles beneath her feet. Bright-eyed birds chirped fearlessly at her, tiny woodland animals scampered away with noiseless haste, pine-branches caught at her with perfumed fingers.

"And I can come here every day," she assured herself joyously. "Never to embroider, never!"

When she returned to the house, the old ladies beamed upon her, drowsy, unquestioning. Lucena had given her the liberty he promised.

The next two weeks passed with flying feet. Farther and farther Floria extended her wanderings, emboldened by the absolute quiet and solitude. She found a little brook that served as a guide, and at first she did not stray beyond the sound of its tinkling ripple. But by and by she abandoned that precaution, and one day the inevitable happened.

She had followed a dazzling humming-bird, a tiny winged jewel that glittered always a few yards beyond her reach, and when it finally disappeared she looked up, to find herself lost.

"Our house is on the top of the mountain; I have only to go up," she thought courageously.

The trees grew close together, stretching away in limitless avenues, with no sign to distinguish them apart. Floria chose one at random, and hurried on.

It had been late afternoon when she first discovered her position; now rosy twilight commenced to creep through the forest. At last she stopped, tired, bewildered, and somewhat frightened.

"I must be near home," she exclaimed. "Perhaps if I call some one will hear, perhaps old Ramon."

She lifted her head and sent her clear voice ringing through the silence. A squirrel peered around the trunk of a tree and chattered inquiringly. Floria laughed, and repeated the cry. In the pause that followed, she fancied a faint crash came from the right. She called again eagerly, and listened. Some one was coming; the snapping rustle of underbrush grew nearer.

"It is Ramon," she reflected with relief.

But the figure which appeared through the trees was not that of the old gardener, and Floria gasped and paled. Lucena's stern, somber face passed before her; then suddenly the forest melted into dazzling violet and azure, while Arria's bitter eyes shone over the telltale glove. Half in pity, half in aversion, she waited helplessly.

Estevan came slowly forward, regarding the young girl in silent surprise. A few feet from her, he stopped and bared his fair head.

"I can assist you, *señorita?*" he asked.

His voice was grave, and singularly calm; his eyes met Floria's directly and steadily. Some indefinable dread slipped away from her, and she answered with equal simplicity.

"I think I am lost, *señor.*"

"You must have come from the house of Ruy de la Vega, *señorita;* pardon, but there is no other."

"Yes, I am Floria del Carpio. I came for a walk, and ventured too far." She glanced away, then met his gaze again. "If you can help me I shall be very grateful, *señor.*"

Estevan hesitated; Floria, watching intently, read his belief that she did not know him. She understood the frown, the temptation not to enlighten her; she saw the effort that put the thought away.

"I am Estevan de Lucena, Doña Floria. With your permission, I will return to the Quinta and send some one to take you home."

Floria colored deeply. The tacit acceptance of his outlawry, the foresight that spared them both her refusal of his escort, touched her with impulsive pity for a pride so fallen.

"It must be very far to the Quinta," she suggested shyly, "and it will soon be dark. Could you not take me yourself *señor?*"

Estevan made a movement, and cast a searching glance at the sweet, flushed face.

"I am honored, *señorita,*" he said, in the quiet tone that perhaps Lucena would not have recognized.

They turned and walked back over the ground that sent forth the spicy perfume stored through uncounted years. Floria was at once amazed and appalled by her own action. All her Castilian loathing of treachery, all the feeling that had made her shrink from the lace that had lain in Estevan's room, had momentarily deserted her; and in their place was only an unreasoning sympathy.

Yet the same generosity that had led her to save Mirando prevented her now from adding to Estevan's punishment; the silence commenced to be embarrassing, and seeing he would not break it, Floria spoke herself.

"That is a beautiful dog, *señor.*"

Estevan looked down at the dignified animal stalking by his side.

"Taric and I are old friends," he answered. "He is constant to a degree men would call folly."

She fancied he thought of his own disloyalty, and changed the subject with nervous haste.

"Probably he would have found me, he looks so wise; and I need not have feared being lost forever."

"Perhaps, but this side of the mountain is very dangerous. It is not safe for you to wander here without a guide, *señorita.*"

"Next time I shall be more careful," she conceded. "It is so easy to lose oneself."

"Very easy, *señorita.*"

Something in the answer brought a pause between them. Estevan turned his head, and recollection went sorrowing down the aisles of the past.

Floria, studying him from behind the shelter of her long lashes, was struck anew by the absence of something she had expected to find in his face. The calmness and repression of his voice were repeated in his expression, yet the traces of strong warfare were obvious in the beauty that was at once so like and unlike Aria's. Certainly it was not suffering that she missed. She roused herself with a start.

"Is it much farther, *señor?*"

"No, *señorita.* Do you see that open space ahead? There is the edge of De la Vega's place."

"So close!" she exclaimed. "Are you quite sure? I walked a long time, *señor.*"

The shadow of Estevan's old smile came back.

"Quite sure, *señorita.* The mountain forms an enormous hollow here, and you followed around its sloping sides. There is the house; will you permit me to leave you?"

They stopped, facing each other.

"I thank you very much, *señor,*" Floria said, acutely conscious that to any one else she would have offered her hand.

Estevan looked at her, gently and steadfastly.

"Do you think I am the one who deserves gratitude for the last half hour?" he asked.

Floria caught her breath, and paled a little.

"My father has frequently spoken of you, Don Estevan," she explained confusedly. "Two months ago he sent me to Rocaverde as the guest of—" She checked herself.

But Estevan completed the sentence without flinching; lingering tenderly, indeed, on the name she had sought to spare him.

"Of Don Luís. Don Raimundo del Carpio has also spoken to me of his daughter, *señorita;* I recollected you at once."

His eyes did not leave hers, and suddenly Floria realized the lack that had puzzled her—the lack of either remorse or bitterness in his expression. Sadness, yes; but nothing of that which should be read in the face of one who has betrayed a friendship, and failed in the loyalty which tradition had set level with religion. Nothing, on the other hand, of the sullen protest and resentment of one unjustly accused. Yielding to an impulse that left no time for reflection, she leaned toward him.

"Why do you stay here?" she demanded earnestly. "Why do you not go to Italy, France—anywhere but here?"

There was no need of explanation; Estevan answered with equal frankness.

"He told me to remain here. I shall never leave without his consent, and that I cannot ask."

Floria knew he spoke of Lucena, and the reply contrasted strangely with his past rebellion. She stood in troubled silence, and in the moment Estevan recovered himself.

"Doña Floria, it is already dusk. Your friends will miss you, and there is an old man in the Quinta who will be anxious even for me if I do not return. May I say good night?"

"Good night, *señor,*" she responded.

It was only a few yards to the house, and Floria crossed them slowly. At the door she looked back, but the dark line of forest told nothing. She had no way of knowing that he watched her from the shadow, a deeper shadow in his eyes. Long after the evening meal was over, long after she had fallen asleep in childish weariness, he still remained there.

CHAPTER XV.

BY THE POOL.

DURING the next few days Floria stayed near the house, and found a new occupation in listening to the Señora Celia's reminiscences. The old lady rambled from subject to subject, pleasantly and inconsequentially. She was of Rocaverde, and Rocaverde was of the sea; through all her stories crept its romance and peril. Many a tale Floria heard of the Lucenas, until, closing her eyes, she could feel the sweep of wet wind through her hair and hear the hurrying din of battle on the shivering decks; until the forest perfume gave place to the bitter-sweet chill of dawn on the water.

But never was Estevan mentioned except in connection with some act of gay good-humor or kindness; even his sternest bravery carried a wild grace of chivalry and youth. Listening, the young girl mutely wondered.

Before the end of a week, however, she was drawn back to the woods—the woods, with their alluring hush and repose. This time she carefully stayed on familiar ground. She discovered a spot where the brook lingered to form a tiny pool before continuing its way; she made this her chosen retreat, coming there every day.

It was nearly a month after her meeting with Estevan when Floria was first disturbed in this nook. She was kneeling by the pool one afternoon, dropping crumbs to the diminutive silver fishes, when a cold nose touched her hand and Taric's intelligent eyes looked up at her. Floria sprang to her feet with a startled exclamation, and turned.

She had expected to see Estevan; so different was the figure confronting her that she stood motionless with astonishment. A little old man was waiting on the edge of the clearing, his bright brown eyes fixed on her with intent scrutiny. His thin, ascetic face was full of eagerness and interest; as Floria gazed at him, he advanced a few steps.

"You are the girl from Ruy de la Vega's?" he inquired bruskly.

Floria flushed with surprise and displeasure.

"I am Floria del Carpio," she answered, "I believe this place is in our part of the forest."

"So it is. If you wish to cause trouble you can tell Don Estevan that I came here."

"I shall not see Don Estevan to tell him anything, *señor,*" she retorted.

"You have seen him once, *señorita,*" he said, with a touch of malice.

"Because I was lost—because I could not help it!" she answered indignantly.

"If it had been possible, you would have refused his aid? So, *señorita?*"

The spirit of defiance seized Floria.

"No, *señor,* why should I?" she declared.

His withered face lit with unnatural youthfulness.

"Why, indeed, *señorita?*" he cried vehemently. "Because there is no man or woman in Rocaverde who would walk at his side—who would not rather die on the mountain than call to him? Does that make him other than he is? They have judged him, these peasants who last year dared not stand covered before him; he is not worthy to be one of them! My lord will not even hear his name, nor remember that he exists. But does all this raise them, or lower him?"

Frightened at his violence, Floria drew back, and cast a dismayed glance around. He read her expression correctly.

"You think me mad, *señorita;* it is not so? I am Leone Valdi; I was Don Estevan's tutor, and I have been with him since he was ten years old. Consider that during the last months I have watched him suffer enough to satisfy the most vindictive, and ask yourself if I can see a new shadow fall upon him! What did you say to him, *señorita?*"

"Nothing to give him pain," answered Floria, in swift response to his earnestness. "Intentionally, nothing, señor Valdi."

"When he came back that night it was to recommence the old battle. *Señorita,* you said something that shook to fragments his hard-won acceptance of this thing."

The young girl's soft eyes dilated in dawning comprehension.

"I asked why he stayed here," she confessed, "I did not realize that he obeyed Don Luís, and I thought it would be easier for him—somewhere else, where no one knew."

"You asked him that? *Señorita,* he has longed for that as you happy people cannot wish for anything. Do you know what the ocean is for the Lucenas—how the need, the passion, the desire for it leaps in their veins and draws them, calls them? Because he makes no complaint, do you think he has not fretted and chafed here in this wilderness?"

In the rush of conflicting thoughts Floria found no answer. The old man studied her for an instant, and his face relaxed.

"After all, it was kindly meant," he said, after a pause. "Forgive me, *señorita*— What is it?"

Floria had started suddenly.

"Some one passed over there," she explained. "A man."

"Don Estevan?" he demanded apprehensively.

"No. I could not see his face, but it was not Don Estevan."

They looked at each other, unreasoningly alarmed.

"No one goes there," asserted Valdi. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, quite sure."

He shook his head, but turned.

"I must go to the Quinta, *señorita.* You will not tell Don Estevan—or I can come no more?"

The idea of seeing him again gave Floria a thrill of pleasure and curiosity. The life she led was rather lonely, and there had even been hours when she regretted the room of embroidering women.

"No, no, I will not, Señor Valdi," she replied eagerly.

She watched him plunge into the forest, then walked slowly home.

As she approached the house, a shout of delight greeted her; a boyish figure emerged from the courtyard and dashed down the slope.

"Juan!" she cried, in surprise.

"Yes, *señorita,*" he panted, snatching the cap from his black curls. "I have been waiting for you half an hour. He went to see *you,* then?"

"Who?" she questioned.

"Pedro Mirando. Oh, I will never tell of it, *señorita;* I only feared he came for something else."

Floria laughed outright with amazement and relief; she also had thought of some one else.

"Certainly not, Juanito. I never saw your Pedro Mirando but once in my life. Why should he come to me?"

The boy met her candid gaze, and his own eyes fell.

"He is one of my lord's officers. *Señorita,* you did not see him in the woods?"

"Perhaps I do not know. Some one passed by at a little distance; I thought they were going to the Quinta."

"Hush, *señorita!*" he cried, and stood staring at her in helpless incredulity.

"But—"

He caught her hand impetuously.

"*Señorita,* if Mirando goes to the Quinta, it is for no good to my lord. Every one is forbidden to go there—every one. If Mirando risks it, why, it is because he must meet Don Estevan! And Don Estevan has tried once to injure my lord."

"But not again!" protested Floria. "Surely not again, Juan, after the forbearance of Don Luís!"

"I do not know," he repeated. "I do not know."

Floria shook her head decisively.

"Juan, I do not believe it."

The boy looked at her sharply.

"*Señorita,* you have changed toward him; have you seen Don Estevan?"

"Yes," she admitted truthfully. "I was lost in the forest, and he brought me home. I cannot believe it."

"I never trusted Pedro Mirando," said Juan sullenly. "*Señorita,* you remember that day you spoke to me over the wall? You were right, and I will defend my lord. But I loved *El Sonriente.*"

"Where are you going, Juan?" she asked breathlessly, as he turned away.

He looked back, his boyish face set.

"I am going to follow Pedro Mirando," he declared.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE METTLE OF LUCENA.

THE old Quinta Lucena had not always been prohibited ground; many a time had Juan Perez led his more adventurous comrades on expeditions through the forest.

He ran steadily and directly, now, avoiding every cliff that might force a détour, and every misleading hill or avenue of trees.

The Quinta was not on the shore, but beside it a long cut ran in from the sea—a cut resembling a Norwegian fiord in somber gloom. Through this the water rushed roaring always; in storm it leaped up the sheer sides, so as to dash the building itself with spray. As Juan reached the last row of trees, he saw Estevan and Mirando standing on the edge of this cliff.

After a moment he made his way in that direction, sore at heart, but determined. A broad stone railing bordered the cliff; by the aid of this and an angle of the Quinta, he crept close enough to see distinctly, and hear a little. And the first sentence was sufficiently startling.

"You might have been killed before now, *señor,*" Mirando was saying, "if we had wished that. You are defenseless enough in this place."

Estevan glanced at him, something of Lucena's cynicism in his expression.

"I am more useful alive, then?" he asked in his clear, steady voice, strangely unfamiliar to the listening boy without its rippling undercurrent of merriment.

Mirando moved impatiently.

"*Señor,* we were selfish, if you will; we saved ourselves at your cost; but that does not make us the criminals you imply. We are trying now to save you from what will not help us. My lord's mood has grown darker and darker; you know that with him delay never means forgetfulness.

"The morning he sailed, when he bade farewell to Doña Soledad, he visited Doña Arria in the garden. One of the waiting-women overheard her cry out upon him for keeping you a prisoner; he answered that your life was his, and that he would not change a sentence pronounced. Since then, Doña Arria has grown whiter and more restless with the passing days, and changes color when my lord's return is mentioned. *Señor,* when he comes, you die."

"That may be. But you have not left me much to grieve for here, Señor Mirando." Estevan spoke composedly, although his eyes were never farther from their old gayety.

"Here, no," Mirando acknowledged. "I did not mean here, *señor.* Have you forgotten the rest—the open sea, the writhing deck beneath your feet, the long

cry of the gulls across a wind-swept arch of sky? You rejoiced in the chance of battle, the flash of steel crossed by the flash of spray; you loved to *live*. Have all these things ended because this little island condemns you? Don Estevan, the east and west lie before you; go, before my lord returns."

Estevan pushed the fair hair from his forehead; the gesture was so familiar that Juan choked in his corner.

"I do not trust your benevolence, Mirando. If you want me to leave—to escape—it is because you have some reason for it. Are you plotting against Don Luís once more, and am I in the way?"

"No, *señor!*" denied the other hastily. "We have had enough of that."

"Ah! Then what is it—are you afraid that my courage will fail, and that I will tell Don Luís the truth?"

Mirando met his scornful smile and flushed dully under his sallow skin.

"Not that you fear death, *señor,*" he answered, sinking his tone. "But, suppose you face what he meant for Gonsalvo. Could you—could any man—keep silence?"

It was Don Estevan's turn to color, the scarlet rushing to his temples.

"Are you mad, Pedro Mirando?" he exclaimed, in anger and contempt. "You, to try to fathom Don Luís with your measure—you, to peer into a mind you cannot dimly conceive! You speak of my cousin, my *cousin;* he may kill me—he has cause—but never *that!* Go and never come here again! Go, you have had from me all you will obtain!"

Mirando retreated a step.

"*Señor,*" he began, but Estevan turned from him unheedingly.

Juan drew nearer, for the man's expression was very evil; and Estevan's back was toward him, as he leaned on the rail and gazed into the swirling water below in the dark ravine. Mirando shrugged his shoulders, and descended the sloping terrace. Juan waited until the trees had closed between, and slipped after him. At the edge of the forest the boy looked back, but Estevan had not moved.

Floria had remained under the Señora Celia's grape-vines, watching anxiously for Juan's return. When he finally reappeared among the pines, she gathered up her trailing dress and ran to meet him.

"You found him?" she demanded. Juan regarded her, his black eyes gloomy.

"Yes, *señorita,* I found him; he went to the Quinta."

"And—Don Estevan?"

"I do not know!" he cried earnestly. "I know nothing that helps. They talked together, but of the old things, and of Gonsalvo. Mirando urges him to escape before my lord comes back."

"Why?" she asked eagerly.

Juan hesitated, then closed his lips firmly.

"I do not know; at least—I have nothing to tell you, *señorita.* But they spoke of no new danger to my lord."

"Don Estevan is right to stay," Floria said, after a brief pause. "It would be cowardly to run away, Juan."

Juan glanced at her almost angrily, then suddenly flung himself face downward on the ground.

"*Madre de Dios!*" he wailed, "I loved him, I loved him! And I hate my lord!"

"Juan!" protested Floria, bending over him in alarmed distress.

He said no more, shaken from head to foot in rebellious grief. The long afternoon shadows commenced to creep down the mountain; the rising breeze stirred among the trees.

"Doña Floria!" called the Señora Paz from the house.

"Go in, *señorita,*" murmured Juan brokenly. "I am going home directly."

Floria laid her hand gently on his tangled curls, then went quietly away.

CHAPTER XVII.

RAINBOW-WINGED.

CONTRARY to Floria's expectations, Juan did not return. She waited a few days, and then resumed her visits to the forest.

Leone Valdi had interested her, and she was curious to know if he would keep his promise to see her. Even to herself Floria would not admit that she desired to hear more of Estevan, although she recognized clearly enough the fascination he possessed. Juan loved him, she

reflected, and the old man; Doña Soledad herself had once softened strangely in alluding to him, while Lucena—Remembering his face, her aversion for Estevan flared up again.

Valdi did not forget. He joined Floria the first day she revisited the pool in the woods. The two met with the friendship of mutual loneliness, and after that he came frequently, sometimes two or three days in succession, again missing as many.

Floria learned that he was an Italian by birth, and that Estevan's father had brought him from Florence to instruct his little son. And Valdi had fulfilled the task well, not neglecting to bring his pupil Dante and Boccaccio as a diversion from his graver classical studies. The Renaissance had come to Rocaverde and added its golden touch, blending Spanish chivalry and Norse sternness into the Estevan and Lucena of the present. To Lucena, such studies had been toys, now unregarded; but Valdi related, with pathetic pride, that to them Estevan turned in his long, desolate days.

Floria listened seriously, her large, soft eyes very thoughtful. The old tutor spoke readily of Estevan and often evening overtook them deeply engrossed in some tale of land or sea in which he was the principal. But of the crime which had brought him an exile to the Quinta, Valdi said nothing. Once, when an unusually long time had elapsed between the visits, he yielded the explanation.

"*Señorita,* there was a storm for two days. When the wind blows strong and bitter salt, and the sea dashes hissing up the rocks, calling, calling—then it is hardest. Last night when I followed him to the edge of the cliff, he bade me go in and leave him. He at least can face it out there; *I* am shut in this prison," he said, and the shrieking gale tore the words from his lips as he spoke.

"He meant Don Luís?" questioned Floria.

Valdi scrutinized her sharply.

"How should I know?" he replied evasively, and would talk no more that day.

The summer advanced, with continuous and increasing heat. The Señora Celia shook her head, and spoke of tempests sure to follow sooner or later. Floria, looking down the yellow road where the sunlight seemed to poise in airy whirlpools, did not wonder that Juan preferred to stay in the sheltered village.

But one morning another visitor came—a visitor who threw the good Señoras de la Vega into the mild agitation they called excitement. Floria was in the shaded stone courtyard among the tubs of flowering plants, and heard nothing of the clatter and noise of arrival, until the unusual rustle of silken robes aroused her. She turned then, and gave a cry of delighted surprise.

"Arria!" she exclaimed, dropping all her gathered blossoms as she sprang forward.

Arria suffered herself to be embraced, and even returned the caress.

"You look well," she commented, with cool serenity, her violet eyes searching the bright, contented face.

Floria laughed joyously.

"Of course, I am always well; and you are always beautiful. You are like the Grecian statue of tinted ivory and gold. Did you really come to see me—just for that, Arria?"

"Yes. Doña Soledad objected, but I usually do as I wish."

"Señorita de Lucena! Command is in your blood, I imagine. Are you tired—will you come in the house?"

"I am not tired; I want to talk with you where it is quiet."

Floria nodded appreciatively.

"Then we will go to my room. Is it not pleasant up here, Arria?"

"It is pleasant for a De la Vega," Arria returned, glancing indifferently around. "For you, after Castile and the castle—"

Floria smiled, and did not reply until they reached the square-raftered room she called her own.

"Perhaps I contrasted it with the convent where I may go. Arria, you are not angry with me any longer?"

Arria laid aside the filmy veils that had shielded her from the dust and took the chair opposite Floria's.

"I was angry because I believed you cared for Don Luís," she stated calmly.

"Oh!" Floria gasped, blushing so

deeply that even her white throat was stained with rose.

Arria regarded her unmoved.

"Because I told Don Luís a childish legend, Arria—because he sent for me to ask about Mirando?"

"Yes."

"And how did you find out that I did not?"

The smile that curved the other's lips was all Lucena.

"It does not matter if you do. Don Luís loves me."

Floria shrank a little, her dark eyes reproachful.

"I think that sounds cruel, Arria," she said seriously. "But I am very glad you and Don Luís are happy. I—if ever I care for any one, it will be for some one I do not fear. Indeed, I did not understand; I thought you disliked Don Luís, and were angry because I amused him that day."

"Why should I dislike Don Luís because Estevan de Lucan deceived him?" demanded Arria hardly. "Estevan's is the fault—Estevan is the bar between us—it is Estevan whom I must defend while I know that if I were Don Luís I would kill him!"

"Arria, Arria, he is your brother!"

"And the kinsman of Don Luís."

Floria twisted her small fingers together, struggling against an utterly unreasonable desire to protect Estevan from the arraignment. Arria arose and walked to the window, shaken from her habitual composure of bearing. After a moment she came back.

"Floria, Don Luís once called you a dainty child; he was right, and you cannot comprehend. This much is so: I cannot, will not, marry Luís de Lucena while Estevan is before the eyes of Rocaverde in his disgrace. I have asked Don Luís to send him away, and he refused. Mirando came to me yesterday."

"Mirando?" echoed Floria, startled.

"Yes. He tells me he was Estevan's chosen officer and aide, and would still help him if he could. He is convinced that Estevan will be in great danger when Don Luís returns, and he urges him to escape now. I do not believe in the danger, although there is no way to gage a Lucena's moods, but I want Estevan to go. I want him out of Rocaverde, and he refuses to leave."

"Because Don Luís bade him stay!" answered Floria warmly. "Arria, it would be cowardly to escape now, when he is left unguarded and unconfined."

Arria raised her eyebrows.

"Does Estevan de Lucena still lay claim to a sense of honor?" she asked with slow contempt.

"You have no pity!" exclaimed Floria. "If he suffers for what is done—if he would give Don Luís all that is left to give—is it for you to prevent?"

"And I? Have *I* no right to happiness, because he chooses to pay a tardy obedience? He *must* go; if it causes him pain, it is of his own sowing."

"What will you do?"

"I shall write to him through Mirando, and remind him of his duty to me."

There was a long pause.

"'Strike not in the dawn of thy wrath, lest when the sun go down it leave you desolate,'" repeated Floria with pensive gravity. "I think Don Luís has learned that lesson, Arria, better—forgive me—better than you."

Arria remained silent.

"I do not like this Pedro Mirando," continued Floria presently. "That time we went to the violet room, he came there, not expecting to meet us; and it was because he had been found there again that Don Luís came to question me. What does he seek in Don Estevan's rooms?"

"He was Estevan's friend; perhaps for that reason the place is agreeable to him."

Floria moved her head doubtfully.

"I would not trust him."

"He wants what I want," Arria replied. "I care nothing why."

A suspicion of Floria's roguish smile appeared.

"Perhaps neither of you will have it," she suggested.

"You mean, he will not go?"

"I mean that if you and Mirando can change him from a resolution held through so many dreary months, through so many torturing thoughts as we can scarcely guess—"

"Well?"

"I shall believe no more in the Lucena firmness."

Arria sighed, and glanced at her almost with irritation.

"I did not come to you for discouragement, Floria. If he does persist, I can do nothing."

"I should marry Don Luís," Floria answered. "Arria *mia,* do you fancy Rocaverde will forget merely because Don Estevan is not here? Don Luís carries in his face that which will ever keep memory awake. If you feel this grief is shame to you—"

"I do."

"Then cure, not hide it. Arria, pay *you* to Don Luís the debt of love your brother owes."

Arria met the splendid, kindling eyes, and for a passing instant realized the pettiness of her own pride—that she planned an added bitterness for Lucena as well as Estevan.

"I do not know Don Luís as you must," Floria went on, "but I know that he loved his cousin, and I cannot believe Don Estevan is in peril. Go to your betrothed, Arria, and trust his generosity to free his prisoner in time."

With an abrupt movement, Arria rose and flung out her hands, as if to put away the charm that held her.

"Never!" she declared determinedly. "Never shall there be a wedding at the castle while there is a captive at the Quinta. I will write to Estevan, and if he stays—"

"As I believe he will."

"Then will come the struggle between Don Luís and me."

"Arria, can you doubt who will be the victor?"

"You think I fear him?"

"Do you not?"

Blue eyes and dark crossed. Arria turned away and picked up her veils, proceeding to drape them carefully around her golden head with its high, jeweled combs.

"Are you coming back to the castle with me?" she asked.

"You are going now?"

"Yes, I promised Doña Soledad that I would return before the noonday heat. You will go with me?"

But Floria drew back from the proposal, with hasty denial.

"Thank you, Arria, no. I love this place, indeed."

"As you will. When you tire of this, we will welcome you below. You still play your guitar?"

"Surely; the *señoras* even keep awake in their chairs to listen. The Señora Celia likes best 'The Heart's Swift Dreams'—you remember?" She sent the clear, soft notes floating through the room as she spoke.

> Ay, dark-winged thoughts that cross my heart,
> Like birds o'er the sky of the past.

Arria regarded her meditatively.

"Your thoughts are all rainbow-winged," she said. "You were created to be happy."

Floria's eyes shadowed strangely.

"They called your brother *El Sonriente,*" she answered, under her breath.

"He chose his path," retorted Arria coldly. "If he laughs no more, it is for his own act."

They went out to where the little train of attendants waited.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE STORM, AND AFTER.

THE end of Floria's conversations with Leone Valdi came unexpectedly, and only a few days after Arria's visit. The intense heat of the summer culminated during this last week in a very ordeal of fire, which left Rocaverde parched and quivering under the white, straight rays which day after day beat down.

Floria, young and vigorous, defied the heat and went to the forest as usual; and on the last day loneliness drove Valdi also to the rendezvous.

"Don Estevan was reading," he said to Floria. "Yesterday I opened an old chest—one of our many forgotten things—and it held strange Eastern manuscripts, and old trinkets dusty with age. *Señorita,* among them was this one that made me think of you, and so I brought it to you."

He laid in her hand a long chain, a series of alternating jewels—topaz and faintly pink pearls strung on a thread of flexible gold. Through many months, perhaps years, some artisan of the Orient

had collected and matched this toy for a petted sultana or lithe dancing-girl, and a Lucena of the past had snatched it away, to lie buried among his uncounted treasures. Floria gave a cry of surprise and admiration as she received the exquisite thing.

"Ah, but I must not keep it, Señor Valdi. I have no right."

"I give it to you, *señorita;* Don Estevan gave it to me."

Floria did not shrink from it as once she had recoiled from the lace that had rested in the violet room; instead, she slowly wound it round her throat and looked over to reply.

But the chain was destined to mute acceptance; with her first word, a terrific peal of thunder broke almost above their heads. Floria's cry was drowned in the rolling echoes, and Valdi rose to his feet. Under the thick trees, neither had perceived the clouds massing sullenly in the sky.

"We must go!" exclaimed Floria, in dismay. "Señor Valdi, we shall never reach the house in time!"

"Not your house," he answered through the rising wind. "Come this way!"

Despite her terror, Floria drew back.

"No, no. Indeed, I cannot."

A second and louder peal of thunder followed her protest.

"Not to the Quinta!" Valdi shouted, catching her hand. "There is an old hut—come!"

She yielded, and together they plunged through the forest. Before they reached the abandoned cottage, great drops of rain were falling. Valdi flung open the door, and they entered tempestuously—Floria rosy and laughing, her soft hair shaken loose and curling riotously around her throat and temples.

"You are wet, *señorita?*" inquired Valdi breathlessly.

"No, not wet—but it is so noisy, and I am still dazzled," she replied gaily. "One sees *nothing!*"

She turned to the old man, growing more accustomed to the semi-darkness. Some one moved from the opposite corner.

"Give Doña Floria a chair, Leone," directed a grave, level voice. "And close the door!"

Floria caught her breath.

"Pardon, *señor,*" she said at once. "The lightning was in my eyes; I did not see you."

Estevan bowed, and she sank into the chair Valdi offered.

"I did not know there was a house here, *señor,*" she remarked presently.

Valdi had withdrawn to the other side of the room, leaving them practically alone.

"The peasants who lived here deserted it months ago," Estevan answered. "Few know of its existence, *señorita.*"

"I think the mountain does not like me," she said playfully. "This is twice I have appealed to you, Don Estevan, for rescue from its caprices."

"The Lucenas and the mountain have always been kind to each other, *señorita.*"

"They understand one another? Indeed, I believe you are alike—so steadfastly calm without, and within—" She checked herself hastily, conscious that the subject was scarcely discreet. She was bewildered and uncertain of what she said, if only it prevented uncomfortable pauses.

But Estevan lifted his head, the color rising under his fair clear skin. Whatever unhappy completion he gave her sentence — however he interpreted her abrupt stop—Floria saw that he was deeply offended.

"Please do not misunderstand me," she said, with graceful directness. "My indiscretion went no further than to contemplate saying that you were both kind to those for whom you cared. I have seen the mountain in the sunshine, and you—" She glanced at Valdi.

Estevan smiled, his face brightening as he looked into hers.

"Leone has been talking to you, Doña Floria? Forgive us both all his exaggerations; he fancies, indeed, that I have been kind to him, and is Italian enough to remember it."

As once before, Floria was grateful for the tact that accepted the first part of her speech without comment. Before she could reply, the storm broke over the forest with a violence that rendered conversation impossible. Valdi retreated still farther into the room, his lips moving noiselessly. Estevan leaned nearer Floria.

"You are not frightened, *señorita?* There is little actual danger."

"No, *señor.*"

The darkness increased, and they remained silent, watching the torrents of rain. The thunder had been almost continuous, but suddenly there came a pause, and the tempest seemed to hesitate.

"Oh, it is going to stop!" exclaimed Floria, rising eagerly. "See, it is lighter!"

In answer there was a blinding glare that filled the room with lavender light, followed by a savage, crashing roar. Floria cried out; and clasping one hand across her eyes, flung out the other in search of support. A second crash followed, and the cottage distinctly quivered.

When Floria ventured to look up, she was leaning against Estevan's breast; his eyes were fixed on her with a concentrated passion of tenderness and hopeless grief that held her absolutely mute.

Only for a moment; then she disengaged herself, flushing warmly crimson.

"Pardon, *señor,*" she faltered, "the thunder frightened me."

Unconscious of his self-betrayal, for the darkness had hidden the unclosing of Floria's darker eyes, Estevan answered with the composure so hardly learned.

"Not without cause, *señorita;* the tree was very close."

She turned quickly, and saw a gigantic pine lying across the threshold, its branches blackened and twisted. She uttered a faint exclamation, shuddering.

"It will soon be over," he added, offering her the chair again.

Floria accepted it gladly, and looked out at the clearing sky. Neither spoke, until a ray of sunlight shot through the dripping forest.

"I am thinking of what the *señoras* will say," Floria declared, with her dimpling smile. "Shall I be able to go home now, *señor?*"

"It is scarcely fit for you," returned Estevan, in perplexity.

"Indeed, I do not mind," she assured him sincerely.

Valdi was smoothing his rumpled attire in his corner; crossing to him, Floria held out her hand.

"Good-by, Señor Valdi," she said demurely. "I hope the next time we meet it will not be in a tornado."

Estevan opened the door for her as she approached.

"I have permission to accompany you, Doña Floria?" he asked.

"If you will be so good, *señor.*"

As they crossed the threshold a rainbow flashed out—a glittering arch over the island—and the heavy perfume of the drenched woods saluted them. Floria drew a breath of sheer delight.

"There cannot be another place in the world so lovely," she asserted.

Something was sending the blood in swift irregular leaps and rushes through her veins—something wild and sweet that had risen beneath Estevan's gaze. He held aside the branches of the fallen tree that she might pass. They walked on, the pines shaking tiny diamonds down on Floria's hair as they went. Turbulent rivulets ran across their path, and the birds were calling shrill comments on the storm. Lifting her hand, Floria accidentally touched the chain of gems which Valdi had given her. The gesture drew Estevan's attention, and glancing up she met his eyes.

"You are looking at Señor Valdi's necklace," she said frankly. "I am afraid it is one of the Quinta's treasures—is it not beautiful?"

"Where it is now, yes, *señorita.* The Quinta contains many such forgotten trinkets; this one is most fortunate."

She smiled, faintly blushing.

"The Quinta should be a place of legends, *señor;* you must love it."

Estevan's firm lips set a little bitterly.

"Legends and memories, *señorita.* I loved the roofless waters."

"Yet the Quinta must have pleasant memories, Don Estevan," she suggested, half timidly. "Can these past months quite overshadow them all?"

He started slightly; it was their first approach to the subject never absent from their thoughts.

"If it were so, Doña Floria, the last hour would make the Quinta a different place," he said, with a gentleness that verged near the expression she had surprised in his face during the storm.

She bent her head, not daring to look at him.

"When you return to Castile," he

added after a moment, "it will be the happy side of Rocaverde you will remember—the castle and village and laughing bay; shall I be forgiven for saying that the dark forest will longest remember you?"

"*Señor*—"

"We are very near the border of the woods, Doña Floria. If ever again you visit Rocaverde—I believe they told me you would soon go to your home—it is probable I shall be no longer at the Quinta. I bid you good-by very gratefully, *señorita,* for a graciousness unfamiliar."

Floria stopped, facing him.

"*Señor,* you are going to do as Arria wishes—you are going away?"

Her cry shattered the dangerous charm that had fallen upon them both. Estevan flung back his head, with the expression of one confronted with a struggle often renewed.

"*Señorita,* I am pained to disappoint you—no. Arria's wishes are those of a child; I wait for Don Luís."

But it was not disappointment that rose in Floria's shining eyes.

"I knew you could not do that, *señor,*" she said simply, and held out her hand.

Estevan flushed suddenly and deeply, then as quickly paled again.

"You mean this, *señorita?*" he demanded, almost harshly.

"Yes," she answered.

Very reverently he took the small hand in his, not raising it to his lips as Lucena had done.

"May every happiness follow you, Doña Floria. Good-by."

"Good night, *señor,*" she responded, avoiding the sadder word.

But Estevan remained silent.

CHAPTER XIX.

JUAN MISSES THE MARK.

THE little household on the mountain-top had been sorely agitated by the storm, and Floria's absence had not been noticed. The Señora Paz asked if she had been in her room, and Floria answered evasively. That was all; but the young girl's eyes were starry bright, and feverish excitement quivered along the broken current of her thoughts.

Late that night she looked from her window; the island hung poised between two heavens—the crystal and velvet arch above and its flawless reflection below—the Mediterranean spreading a floor of stars as far as she could see. Lucena was out there, she reflected; and she felt her heart go out to the man who sorrowed for Estevan. After a while, she laid her cheek upon the chain of topaz and pearl.

The next day dawned with a return of the cloudless sky and merciless heat. Nothing daunted, Floria went as usual to the forest.

Traces of the storm were everywhere—torn branches strewing the ground, overturned birds'-nests, and new, muddy brooks. The pool itself had swept down its banks, and had become a miniature swamp. Floria contemplated the wreck in dismay, her dress gathered about her as she stood on the higher ground. She was too absorbed to notice Valdi's arrival, until he spoke.

"*Señorita,*" he said, in a cautiously subdued voice.

Floria turned with an exclamation of pleasure.

"You, Señor Valdi! I fancied you would not come to-day."

He raised his finger warningly, and looked around.

"Hush, *señorita!* I do not know where Don Estevan may be. This is the last time I shall see you."

"The last time! You are going away—you are going to leave the Quinta?"

"No, *señorita.* On the contrary, I will stay there. I am ordered to come here no more."

She regarded him wonderingly.

"But why, *señor?*"

Valdi shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

"Why?" she urged.

His sharp brown eyes studied her a second before he replied.

"Don Estevan loves you, *señorita;* can he take you to the Quinta?"

Before the fact thus certainly stated Floria stood wordless.

"Or can he go to your Castile? Neither? Then let him choose his course—as once before he chose it, in spite of my lord himself. Last night you gave him your hand."

The abrupt transition startled her.

"You know?" she murmured.

"He told me. Last night when he came in—there are things that make one old to witness, *señorita*. But he bade me go no more to talk with you."

"Because you speak to me of him?" she questioned softly.

"He would guard you from what has come to him."

Floria moved her head in tranquil denial.

"It is too late, *señor*."

"*Señorita!*" he cried.

She came up to him, her glowing face most earnest.

"I can help," she assured him eagerly. "You do not know how kind Don Luís has always been to me, and he grieves that Don Estevan should be here. I will go to him when he returns—you shall see."

But Valdi's expression remained unconvinced; he had no faith in Lucena's kindness. Moreover, he had seen Arria's letter to her brother. By Mirando's subtle advice, she had carefully refrained from reassuring Estevan as to Lucena's intentions. She, of course, had no idea that Mirando had woven circumstances and falsehood into a fabric that left Estevan little room for doubt. Of all this Valdi had been commanded not to speak, and it cost him something to comply.

"When my lord comes home, it will be better that you return to your country, *señorita*," he said dejectedly. "What a Lucena has decided to do will be done, and that race is not to be swerved."

Floria smiled in unshaken confidence, already intent on her own plans.

"You will see," she repeated.

Valdi gazed at her as she leaned against a tree, her long, dark lashes sweeping her flushed cheeks. After a pause he drew quietly back, retreating step by step until the forest swallowed him, still keeping his eyes fixed on the thoughtful figure. Floria made no effort to stop him; in fact, she scarcely perceived his departure.

That afternoon Juan Perez came up from the village for the first time in weeks, and found Floria in the courtyard under the yellow roses. He responded to her greeting with an air approaching the morose, and flung himself down on the ground at her feet.

"I believed you had forgotten me," she said lightly. "You have nothing to tell me? Are you all well and happy in the village?"

"We are as always, *señorita*. Emilia Diaz spends all her days on the shore watching for the sails, and Rosa Paredes is betrothed for the sixth time. Padre Jacinto misses you very much, Doña Floria; he says the castle was never so dull. I think he has grown grayer, these last months."

Floria bent forward to see his face.

"Something is wrong with you, Juanito."

"My lord has already been away longer than usual," he answered sullenly. "He must return soon."

"I hope so," she said, very gently.

Juan sat up impetuously, staring at her.

"You want him to come back, *señorita?*"

"Why not?"

"You look," he mused irrelevantly, "like Emilia, the day Diaz came home. Is it—that, *señorita?*"

She made no reply, but her great eyes were mystic, splendid in their new radiance. Juan caught her dress.

"If it is," he stammered breathlessly, "if it is—you will help Don Estevan—you will save him?"

She hid her face on the arm of the chair, and her falling bronze hair veiled her from his gaze. Juan's hot, daring young lips pressed her soft hand.

"I will love my lord now, if I can," he whispered. "You will forget the foolish things I have said, not knowing, *señorita*—because I will serve you all my life."

And Floria, her cheek resting on the palm Estevan had touched, perceived nothing of his mistake. After a while, Juan slipped quietly away and left her alone.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SILVER LOTUS.

THE afternoon moved placidly on. When the evening meal was over, Juan took his leave, lingering to glance back

at the dark eyes that persistently avoided his.

The Señora Paz was occupied with some bit of sewing; in the seat opposite, her sister fell into snatches of sleep and as suddenly started awake, with monotonous alternation. Floria regarded them dreamily, the silent guitar on her knee. Over the Mediterranean the moon mounted into the sky, round, perfect, the full-blown flower of light.

"I remember," said the Señora Celia, breaking from a doze into one of her fragmentary reminiscences, "I remember when Jayme de Lucena brought home his white wife. From far across the oceans she came, from another great island which they say is a place of mist and fog. Rosamond he called her, and for beauty she was the very lady who came here the other day. Only, the smile of Doña Rosamond was a sunshine of the heart, and her son has her laughing eyes.

"But, when Don Jayme went down by the side of his lord and brother, and they died together as they had lived, the Lady Rosamond pined, and followed him in a few months. Often I saw her, pacing up and down the great arched hall of the castle in her black velvet robes, the black lace over her yellow hair, leading the little girl, while Don Estevan walked beside them. *Ay de mí,* poor lady! Sister, is that fair girl her daughter?"

"Yes, Doña Arria it was who came here. Celia, think of other things!" replied the Señora Paz, with some impatience.

Floria quietly leaned the guitar against her chair, and rising, went to the door. After a moment she stepped into the moonlit plateau before the house, and stood gazing at the lights of the village, twinkling far below.

She was aroused from her reverie by a voice so unexpected, so apparently impossible, that she allowed the call to be repeated before answering.

"Doña Floria!" it came.

"*Señor?*" she faltered, turning.

Estevan was standing on the edge of the cleared space, a conspicuous figure in the brilliant light, as he waited with uncovered head for her reply. Floria crossed to him, wide-eyed and suddenly shy.

"*Señorita,* you are certainly right to be surprised," he said, with quiet gravity. "Will you yield so much to my position as to permit me to speak to you here?"

Slightly to one side, a rustic chair was set in the shelter of a tall bush. For answer, she moved there and sat down, lifting her trustful face to him.

Estevan paused; when he spoke, it was not quite steadily.

"You are more than good to me, *señorita.* If I have ventured here tonight, it is because I feared—Leone has told me you spoke of Don Luís."

"He told you that!" she exclaimed, coloring hotly.

"Leone has few secrets from me, *señorita.* He fancied you thought of helping me—"

His hesitation gave her courage.

"Yes," she answered. "Don Luís would listen to me, I am quite sure; I am not afraid, indeed. Señor Valdi said that I had troubled you, and I meant to ask that you might go away. I know you could not go as Arria wished, but openly—it would be different. You are not angry, *señor?*"

"Angry! Doña Floria, if you could understand!" He checked himself with a violent effort, and shook his head impatiently. "Forgive me, it is so long since I have met kindness that I acknowledge it awkwardly. *Señorita,* there are no words for my gratitude, but what you imagine is not possible. I ask it of you earnestly—never think of that again!"

"Why?" she asked, rising to face him with a child's impetuousness. "Why, *señor?* You are not guilty of the thing they say; if you were, do you think I would be here, or that I would have given you my hand the other evening? I do not ask you to explain—I know it is not so."

Estevan stood still, his eyes on hers.

"What has Leone told you?" he demanded.

"Nothing!" she answered passionately, "I believe I knew it the first day. *You* could not have done that. Perhaps you are shielding some one else—some one dear to you; such things have happened."

"I would not have brought this dis-

grace on my house to shield the guilt of any one living!" Estevan retorted.

"I do not ask you to explain; I only know you never did that thing—I *know*."

"And if I told you I had? Remember, I made no defense—I never will."

She moved a step nearer—never more lovely, never more purely maidenly.

"I love you," she said, bravely and sweetly. "Will you tell me that now, Don Estevan?"

Where Lucena had failed, Floria conquered. All the loneliness of the past months was in the movement that swept her to his arms.

"No!" he exclaimed, his voice breaking in surrender. "Not to you—not to you!"

They rested so for a long moment.

"I am guilty now, indeed," he said at last. "Floria, how have I let you care for me? I was mad to come here to-night—to let your dear graciousness tempt me to linger by you in the forest. What have we done, Leone and I?"

"It was not your fault, nor mine," she murmured. "All my life I have known this hour would come to me. I have walked to it through sunshine and you—through what sorrow!"

"Dear, then destiny gave you a sad inheritance."

"No."

"No? When I have not so much to offer you as the poorest sailor in Don Luís fleet? Floria—"

She raised her eyes to meet his and stopped the sentence.

"I said it to you," she protested softly. "If you care, say it to me."

He said it, with indescribable reverence.

The long look that followed left them so close in spirit as few ever become. Estevan, standing on this frail hour, poised between past and future tragedy, felt with the young girl an ethereality of love which neither claimed nor desired the things of earth. Floria's serene and radiant face, set lily-like in the sea of silver light, blinded him to both Quinta and castle. Floria gave to him that which Arria had denied to Lucena, a brief forgetfulness.

But of the strength of his love was born recollection, and he bent his head over hers as the burden slipped back.

"I have been selfish, cruel. Love of mine, we must go back to our own worlds; with me you can have nothing to do."

Floria smiled in soft content.

"Nothing to do, Estevan—after this? No, you will let me tell Don Luís, and in some other country you can make a home for us. And my father—he will trust you as I do, and take us both away."

Estevan looked away from her clear, untroubled eyes, and she felt him shiver.

"Floria, you must ask Don Luís nothing for me. Can your trust yield me so much?"

"Yes," she answered. "If you wish that, Estevan, I will come to the Quinta."

"You would dare? Dear, how can I make you understand?"

"Do not try to-night," she pleaded. "To-morrow, if you will, but not to-night."

The house-door opened suddenly, bringing a glare of yellow light.

"*Señorita!*" called an uncertain voice.

"It is the Señora Paz," she whispered. "To-morrow?"

"Where you met Leone. Floria—"

A sighing breeze rustled the shrubbery and startled awake a sleepy bird, who sent forth the first notes of his song, then stopped abashed.

The Señora Paz, waiting placidly on the step, smiled admiringly at Floria, as she came up.

"The night is hot and still," she remarked, dropping the wooden bolt in place. "Doña Floria, a very rose of spring has our mountain made you."

The Señora Celia looked up dreamily.

"Rose of the world, Don Jayme called her," she corrected, her thoughts far afield. "But such roses wither without the sun."

Floria went on to her own room, her eyes still dazzled by the glance that had met them, her lips still softly curved with the wonder of their first kiss. Finding herself alone, she remained standing for a little while in the center of the floor; then moved to her favorite low chair and sat down.

Gradually the house sank into silence; one by one the lights flickered out. Af-

ter a while, Floria rose and crossed to the window. The night was in truth unusually still; up here there was not even the lap of the sea to break the hush. Overhead the moon hung now, and under its direct rays Floria saw the betraying shadow by the flowering bush.

"*Señor!*" she called daringly, not venturing to utter aloud the name that would have startled into attention any listener in Rocaverde.

The tall figure came to her promptly, yet with a certain hesitation.

"I saw you," she said, leaning on the broad stone sill to regard his face. "I think—I think I *knew* that you would not go away so soon. To-night is all ours, to-morrow we do not know. Do you not wish to-night would linger forever in Rocaverde, Estevan?"

"Dear, but to-morrow will surely come," answered Estevan tenderly. "Is this safe for you?"

The window was just so high that they might have touched each other's hands; their low tones ran no risk of waking a household so dull.

"There is no one to hear," she replied. "Estevan, do not look so grave; give me this hour without thought of what is to come. Will it make to-morrow different because we grieve to-night?"

"Truly, I believe not," he admitted, his warm, gentle smile flashing up. "Love of mine, what shall I say to make this hour yours? Tell you again all you know so well; that when I saw you first you entered the gates of my heart, and closed them behind you?"

"If you will. Or why, when I crossed the threshold of the violet room, something shot through my veins to warn me a friend had dwelt there."

"The violet room?" he questioned, puzzled.

"Your room. The Italian romance still lies on the table; the scarf still rests where you let it fall; the silence listens for your voice. Ah, forgive me—it is I, now, who sadden you."

"No, no. But tell me, rather, of yourself."

"You know all of me that matters," she answered simply. "The Floria of the court, the Floria of the castle—they were only shadow girls until the Floria of to-night. The world lies like a silver lotus open to the moon, and Rocaverde is its golden heart. Estevan, when my ship anchored in the bay, I fancied this island resembled a great garden in Fez—all emerald and gold and white, with the splash of fountains and perfumes of the south. You have heard of those flower-girdled palaces?"

"I have seen them, *alma mia.*"

Floria gave an exclamation of amazement.

"Seen them? You, Estevan—a Spanish noble, a Christian—have visited the stronghold of Morocco? I thought death waited long before you neared its shore!"

"Yes. But five years ago Don Luís was wounded and made prisoner by the Moors, through a trick, and I went to Fez in search of him."

"Alone, or to attack the city with the ships?"

"Dear, I could have done nothing alone, and an army would scarcely have taken Fez. The Sultan at that time was menaced by his own people; I offered our aid in crushing the rebellion in exchange for the liberty of Don Luís. The offer was accepted, and so I saw the gardens of Fez."

Through the quiet statement Floria caught a glimpse of Eastern war, the glitter of steel and gold, the flying horses bearing warriors gorgeous in silk and gems.

"And—you won?" she demanded eagerly.

Estevan smiled.

"Could we lose, *querida mia?*"

"Not when you fought for Don Luís —I understand."

There was a little pause; then she added, with reproach for the absent Lucena.

"After that, he could believe this thing of you, Estevan?"

Estevan winced, with the old jealous dread of hearing Lucena's name coupled with a fault.

"You must not blame him; he believed no charge against me except my own," he answered, a little hurriedly. "And what I did at Fez was so small a thread in the woven stress of war and sea that made our lives. Don Luís has risked more for me, and I for him. We

never kept petty account of what we owed each other of life or success. Floria, if you trust me, you must trust him also."

"I meant to keep dark thoughts from you, and instead I have brought them," she murmured plaintively.

"Love of mine, I have only one dark thought to-night, and that is fear for you."

"Then send it away, Estevan. I would have gone from here to a convent, on my father's return; can worse happen to me now? And I shall be happy all my life, knowing that you care for me."

Leaning down, she reached her hand to him, and he clasped it firmly in his own.

"You will go home to the Quinta, Estevan? You will not wander all night in the lonely forest?"

"I will go to the Quinta, if you wish it, lady and princess."

"The moonlight is too weak. If I could see into your eyes, I am afraid there would be no laughter, Estevan."

"Floria, *mia,* do the happiest laugh?"

"Then you will believe in our happiness, as I do, indeed?"

"Yes," he lied steadily.

She breathed a sigh of profound content and slipped her hand from his.

"Good night—" She paused as the faint peal of a bell floated up from the village, then laughed softly. "*Ave Maria purísima! Las doce, y todo es sereno!* Good night."

Estevan caught his breath, and the hand that fell to his side clenched.

"Good night," he said, very quietly. "Floria, *mia,* God have you in His keeping."

The quaintly solemn phrase of farewell was all earnest on his lips, yet fell so lightly as not to shake her airily built fancies. Her half questioning glance was met by the smile whose exquisite tenderness had been learned in the ordeal by the fire.

(To be continued.)

ROGERT'S WEAKNESS.

By Don Mark Lemon.

CALCULATED to make the reader's mouth water and his heart bleed at the same time.

"STEP this way, sir. Mr. Ney will see you."

The young man arose and followed the clerk into an inner office, where a pleasant-faced, gray-haired man was seated at a large roll-top desk, reading a brief. As the door opened, he wheeled about and arose.

"This is Mr. Rodman Rogert?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah!" The lawyer shook his client's hand warmly, then requested him to be seated, nodding to the clerk to go.

The younger man took the proffered chair, while the attorney resumed his own.

"Mr. Rogert, I believe you were well acquainted with the late Henry Morgan?"

"Not intimately."

"Not intimately!"

"No, I cannot say I was. There was a certain coldness—or, rather, I should say a certain distance—about Mr. Morgan that precluded an intimate friendship. Then, he was twice my age, and that makes a difference."

The lawyer thumbed a paper-weight reflectively. "So I see, so I see. Yes, he was fifty, while you are—"

"Twenty-five."

"Ah! But I will not cross-question you until I have revealed the reason why I have requested your presence here. Mr. Rogert, it seems that, by the last will of the late Henry Morgan, you are made the sole heir; and the estate is considerable. I may say very considerable indeed. However, there are cer-